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The German Government in relation to Works of Art in Belgium

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Ugo Ojetti a writer of fiction in Florence, has invented and spread a foolish story according to which the chief director of the Berlin Museums, is supposed to have given the German military authorities a „proscriptive" list of works of art to be taken from various public collections in France. Further, Ojetti says that as this plan could not be carried out, the director had advised the destruction of the Reims Cathedral. — This absurd and infamous libel was repeated and perhaps believed in all countries. But whilst we have been thus denounced as robbers and barbarians, Germany and Germany alone has in reality taken steps in order to protect works of art in the enemies country. — Directly after the occupation of Brussels the director of the Industrial-Art-Museum in Berlin, Herr von Falke, was appointed on my suggestion to superintend the protection of works of art in Belgium and their preservation for Belgium.

Herr von Falke with the help of gentlemen employed in the Belgian public collections has examined the works of art in the occupied parts of Belgium and it has been ascertained that in all large towns ancient buildings, paintings, works of sculpture and of industrial art of any importance are in a perfect state of preservation, and are in safety with one single exception — the library of Louvain. — The statement made in various towns that pictures or church treasure have been brought to London seems not to have been true, not even in the case of the van Eyck altar in Gand. In reality such precious objects seem to have been hidden in cellars and other safe places. The preservation of these art treasures and the almost perfect state of preservation of all architectural masterpieces are wholly due to the extreme care taken by the

Germans to avoid damaging the buildings during the bombardment of towns, wherever the bombardment was absolutely necessary from a military point of view.

In the case of the treacherous attack made on our troops by the people of Louvain, German soldiers saved the town hall and the churches from destruction by fire at the risk of their own lives. — The burning of the library was entirely the fault of the library officials who had all fled neglecting their obvious duty. —

That the Belgian government took no pains to preserve Belgian buildings is proved by the fact that whilst Herr von Falke was examining the cathedral of Malines the Belgian artillery fired shells at the building.

During the Siege of Antwerp General von Beseler himself requested the Belgian commander to give him a list of artistically valuable buildings and succeeded most admirably in preserving these from harm during the bombardment. — In Gand and Bruges all monuments of architecture are intact. — In Reims also the German commander did all that was in his power to preserve not only the cathedral but also the older church of St. Remy from serious damage during the bombardment although the French repeatedly placed batteries in the neighbourhood of the cathedral and made use of the towers as posts of observation.

Religious feeling and knowledge and love of art which are as widely spread in the army as in the nation have everywhere made our army a protector of architectural masterpieces and of all works of art.

Dr. W. von Bode.

Dr. M. von Bode.

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